

Press Release

Dor Guez: *Pendant Letters*

Dvir Gallery is pleased to announce a new solo show by Dor Guez, to open on Saturday February 22 at 11am. The show runs until Saturday April 5.

Dor Guez (b. Jerusalem) is an artist and archive researcher. His artistic practice revolves around the ways in which contemporary art may assume a role in the writing of historical narrative, a work which he has undertaken in the context of Arab cultures in the Middle East. As in his previous exhibitions, Guez continues to investigate modes of representations and the uses of photographic practice. The exhibition features seven objects, four video works and photographic images produced using a special scanning technique developed by the artist for the Christian Palestinian Archive – a project initiated by the artist which encompasses thousands of images by professional and amateur photographers alike, originating from a worldwide diaspora of Christian-Palestinian communities. Like in the archive project, the assorted items displayed in the exhibition were obtained through private contributions.

The title, *Pendant Letters*, derives from a literal translation of the Arabic *maalek*, a term designating the Judeo-Arabic script used among Jews in the Arab world. One of the videos on show features the manuscript of a play written in the 1950's in pendant lettering, by an amateur playwright by the name of Shahadani. Shahadani emigrated from Tunis to Israel in 1951, a time of massive Jewish immigration from North Africa. A parallel video channel presents the story of Shahadani's wife, Zina, who during the 1930's and 1940's was a famous actress in the Jewish theater in Tunis. In Israel the family settled in Lod, in an 'abandoned' Arab house rented from the Jewish Agency. It is there that they started a Jewish-Arab theater company of some 30 actors. Shahadani wrote plays in a mixed Judeo-Arabic dialect, with plots based on Biblical stories of Jews in minority, compromising circumstances such as Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors or the Book of Esther. He also composed the music and directed the productions, while Zina, now 97, acted as principal actress, sewed costumes and designed stage sets. Their Jewish-Tunisian theater kept going for a number of years, helping them to preserve their Arab heritage. But with no exterior funding it ran into difficulties, and in 1959 had to close down.

The videos in the exhibition feature one-shot sequences, each documenting a continuous, repetitive action captured in steady-cam: leafing through a booklet, sorting through photographs, spreading parchment papers on a work board, and changing cassettes in a tape. It also showcases a number of items: a booklet with the handwritten manuscript of Shahadani's *Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors*, various theatrical costumes and props designed by Zina, complete with sewing patterns on parchment paper she devised, a photographic documentation of the *Queen Esther* production, audio cassettes carrying songs

in various Arabic dialects, and Zina's color-coded button collection, amassed throughout her life in Tunisia and Israel. As in his Christian-Palestinian Archive project, neither here does the display conform to established museal and archival ordering systems, but rather to a logic of individual contribution and preferences.

Dor Guez has exhibited solo exhibitions in museum and notable exhibition spaces in Israel and worldwide, among them the Petach Tikva Museum of Art, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Beursschouwburg Center Brussels, KW Institute for Contemporary Art Berlin, the Jewish Museum New York, the Mosaic Rooms Center for Contemporary Arab Culture, London, Artpace San Antonio, and the Rose Art Museum, Boston. Five of his solo shows were accompanied by catalogues. His works were shown in numerous group shows, among them the biennials of Istanbul, São Paulo, Moscow, Bénin, and Budapest, as well as the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, and MAXXI in Rome.

Prizes include the Perlmutter Visiting Artist Award from the Rose Art Museum, the Orgler Scholarship from the Tel Aviv University, and the International Artist-in-Residence program at Artpace San Antonio. Guez conducts his research at the Tel Aviv University, where he is a Ph.D. candidate, and is a faculty member of the History and Theory department in the Bezalel Academy, Jerusalem. His research project on archives, *Pre-Israeli Orientalism*, is due to appear this coming year.